LIBRARY BUILDINGS

.. BY ..

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SELECTION of an architect; kind of building; provision for free access to the shelves; importance of supervision; requisite rooms; floors; ventilation; design

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LIBRARY BUILDINGS.

The public library is an ancient institution, but when it came under the influence of the intense activity of the latter part of the nineteenth century, it received such an extraordinary expansion and such a revolution of methods as to make it almost a new creation.

The modern movement may be traced to the organization of the American Library Association and the establishment of library schools. Under these two influences library administration has become a profession, requiring special training as much as for the other learned professions. At the same time the erection of library buildings became sufficently frequent to warrant architects in making a specialty of their planning.

It is interesting to an architect to note how much time is given at conventions of librarians to the subject of library architecture. These discussions are necessary because library architecture is in a state of transition. The problem of school houses or a church is not radically different now from what it was ten

years ago, and architects can find many good precedents to guide them, but a library built even five years ago is almost certain to be out of date. This is no reflection upon the library of five years ago, which may have been erected to accommodate the method of library administration at that time. It means that librarians have changed their minds during that period, or that the whole profession now stands where only a few radicals stood before.

It is not the province of the architect to invent methods of library administration, but to accept the best methods in vogue, and invent new forms of building to fit the new methods. In this brief discussion of the library building of to-day, it is assumed at the outset that the building is to be managed on the "open shelf" or free access plan. It is perfectly safe to erect a building with this plan in view, because it will be equally convenient for the old method.

To bring our discussion at once to a practical beginning, let us suppose that a library board is about to erect a new building, and inquire what actions they should take and in what order.

First. Select a trained librarian, if not already blessed with one. There have been cases where a library board has ignored the librarian during the planning of a new building, saying that "the librarian is an old fogy and we will get a better one when we

finish the new building." The proper course is to get the new librarian and then take her advice in regard to the building.

Second. Select an architect with as much care and in much the same manner as you do the librarian.

The usual method is to defer the selection of an architect until after the choice of a site, thereby losing the professional advice of the architect as to the merits of various sites. The building committee may be competent to decide the convenience of location, and the architect will gladly relegate to them the decision between the rival sides of the city, but there are many points of an architectural nature in connection with the site that require professional advice.

There have been not a few cases recently in which library boards could have been saved the selection of unfortunate sites by the advice of an architect.

In the selection of the site several things should be taken into consideration: (1) That it is conveniently located for the use of the public who are most in need of it; (2) that it should be of sufficient size not only for the present needs, but for its future growth and extension; (3) that the surroundings are such as to insure the safety of the building and its contents, and (4) that the surroundings give a proper architectural environment to the building.

The lot should be as near the business center as possible, care being taken to avoid the noise likely to result from heavy traffic and electric cars. It is a mistake to locate the library in the best residence portion of the town, where it is taken away from the class of people who need its help the most; special consideration should be given to the working population.

Regarding the second question, the lot should be as large as the appropriation will afford, so as to admit of light and air on all sides. The idea seems to prevail that the only lot which should be considered is a corner lot, but this is not always so, for an inside lot, with good frontage, admits of great economy in the construction of the building. In fact, the stack room, when in the rear, can in most cases be made without any architectural effect whatever.

The surroundings are an important question. If it is possible, the library should be detached from other buildings as far as practicable, so as to diminish the risk of damage by fire, and also to admit the free access of light and air.

Considering the library as an architectural monument and one of the most important buildings in our smaller cities, it should be so located as not to be surrounded by cheap structures; but, on the other hand, it should be grouped, if possible, with other public

buildings. It is a mistake to scatter the various public buildings of the city, thereby making but a small impression with each one; but, rather, they should be grouped together around some open space, so that there shall be one place in the city that rises above the commonplace.

Our libraries are usually comparatively low buildings, and should not be placed in close proximity to high business blocks. It is better to let a street intervene between the business section and the library, locating the library in the same block with the residences rather than business property.

Selection of an Architect. As the success of a building depends mainly upon the services of the architect, it is a matter of the greatest importance that the library board should make no mistake in their choice, and it is worth while to give some consideration to the best method of procuring architectural services

It should be borne in mind that the first object to be attained is not the selection of the plan, but a man to make the plan. If this point were clearly understood many mistakes would be avoided. No committee will find a plan ready made that will exactly meet the requirements of their case. Architects are not dealers in ready made plans, but are professional advisers, who make a special study of each case, and after consultation with the

owners, evolve a plan that will be the solution of that case. If committees would spend more time in studying the qualifications of the various architects, and less time on the study of the plan which they wish to adopt in their particular case, fewer mistakes would be made in the erection of the buildings. The time for the committee to study the plan is after they have selected their architect; because an architect is not in a position to give his client confidential advice concerning the many questions relating to the plan until he has been definitely employed, nor is the committee likely to make any real progress towards the solution of the case in hand until they have the assistance of an architect. An architect selected outright feels at once that he has the confidence of his clients, and any man worthy of the profession cannot feel that he is trusted without doing his best to justify the confidence placed in him.

The mistake is sometimes made in boards copying some building already built, because it has proven satisfactory for that particular place, to find only too late that it is not the best selection for their local conditions, for it has been found that almost every city or town differs in its requirements. The same general plan may seem feasible, but there will always be certain local conditions which will make it a different problem. You cannot look to the

plan for the final success of the building; back of the plan is the architect, and it is to him you must look for success.

A competition might better be called a "guessing match;" an architect trying to guess what will please the various members of the committee.

Whenever an architect enters a competition he goes in to win, and it would be foolish indeed for him to ignore the wishes of the committee, however absurd their ideas may be concerning the problem in hand. A man who is sick may think that he knows what is the matter with himself and try to give directions for his prescription, but if he will tell his physician how he feels and let him diagnose the case, his recovery will be more certain. Just so with a committee; if they will tell the architect how they feel about a building and let him solve the problem, the result will show the superiority of professional over amateur skill.

After the architect is selected, he must inform himself on the various points before he can prepare an outline sketch indicating, in a general way, his views and the views of the board, of course calling into consultation the librarian, which is too frequently neglected. The one person who should be most consulted in the making of a plan for a library building is the librarian, and she must, indeed, be but illy fitted for her business who cannot give

many valuable points concerning the interior arrangement of a library building. If the organization is a new one and the librarian has not yet been employed, the various states have library commissions, whose duty and pleasure it is to give advice on points pertaining to their work, and, even though there is a librarian, this consultation with the commission is a wise one.

The architectural profession is so clear in its idea that the primary selection should be of an architect rather than of a plan, that in the official circular of the American Institute of Architects on the subject of competitions, it is stated that whenever a competition is instituted, the purpose of that competition should be the selection of the architect who is best fitted to have charge of the case in hand, rather than the selection of a plan which can be adopted in its entirety.

Members of library boards are right in feeling that as custodians of a public trust, they must consider the claims and qualifications of more than one architect; but this consideration may be given in ways more effective than by a competetion. Let a time be set when the various architects may appear before the library board and give an account of themselves and their work, then let the library board follow up this consultation with a thorough investigation into the record of each architect. Such a method, carefully followed

out, can hardly fail to secure the services of an architect well qualified for the solution of their problem.

After the architect has been selected and had a confidential meeting with the library board, he must first inform himself on many practical points, such as the following:

Size of lot; location and surroundings; appropriation at hand; local materials; how long the present library has been in existence; number of volumes in the present library; population of the town; whether the population is likely to increase, and in what proportion; what the classes of readers are, whether mechanics or literary people; money available for yearly maintenance; average yearly increase; number of attendants in charge of library; what the space occupied by the present library is, and whether this space is large enough; whether the library is to be run on the ''open stack'' system, or if there will be an open shelf room; the number of volumes to go into the children's room; the number of reference books; as to whether there should be a separate room for newspapers and periodicals, other than the general reading room; an extra room in the way of a study or seminary room for special work required; librarian's room tor cataloguing or work room, separate or combined; a bindery; a trustees' room, and if any provisions are to be made for a lecture room, to accommodate meetings for matters

pertaining to art and literary advancement; a museum and art room, etc.

After going over these various points, the architect is then in a position to prepare a tentative plan, embodying the various points that are the result of his consultation with the members of the board and the librarian.

Libraries may be grouped under three different heads: Reference libraries, university and college libraries, and city libraries. Under the latter head they vary somewhat according to the size of the town, but I shall devote most of my time to the description of libraries outside of those in the very largest cities.

The small library has been recognized to have so many excellent features, that the tendency is to retain as many of these as is possible in the larger buildings.

In general, a public library should contain an entrance hall, delivery room, general reading room, reference room, a children's reading room, librarian's office and a cataloguing room (these rooms either separate or combined, and varying according to the size of the library), and a room for special study; and in the larger libraries, a newspaper and periodical room. In the libraries of moderate size those should be located, as far as possible, on the first floor.

Provision for future growth can sometimes be made by having rooms on the second floor for the reference department.

The second floor may contain, also, a small lecture room, museum and art gallery, a trustee's room, and rooms for special study, the use of which, the future only can determine.

In the basement may be located the boiler and fuel rooms toilet rooms for both sexes, with separate stairs leading to each, an unpacking room and work room, and a large room, preferably directly under the stack room, for the storage of governmental reports and books which have become crowded out of the first floor and are not frequently consulted.

If the building is only one story and basement, the lecture room can be accommodated in the basement, and it is not advisable to recommend a two story building where the appropriation is under $20,000. In buildings where the appropriation is greater, it is wise to make proivsions for a second story, even though this is not finished at the time of the erection of the building. We have found from experience that where the appropriation is more than $20,000, the cost of one story and a high basement is but little less than a two story building and basement, with the second story unfinished. In order to get an architectural effect in a one story building, the ceilings must be quite high. In a two story building this is not necessary; therefore, the difference in cost between a one and a two story building is very slight. In a one story

building, the extra height of ceiling adds to the cost of heating, over that of a building with the first story of the ordinary height. The impression seems to prevail that in order to get an architectural effect, one must have high ceilings, but the tendency in the modern library is to retain as much as possible of the domestic effect that is found in the home library, and this can better be obtained with a ceiling of ordinary height.

One of the most common arrangements in the library, as we find it, is the location of the entrance at the center of the front of the building. Lying directly back of the entrance is the delivery room; to the right and left of the delivery room in the two wings, we find a general reading room and reference room, a children's reading room, and back of the delivery room, to the rear, is located a stack room, and of a width that will overlap the ends of the two reading rooms. In one of the internal angles formed by the intersection of the stack room and reading room, is found the librarian's and cataloguing room, and in the other a reference study, which is convenient to both the stack and general reading room. This general arrangement applies to small and medium sized libraries. Where the conditions are such as to demand greater space, provision should be made for a separate reference room. Sometimes this can be conveniently located on the first floor. If the appropriation

is too small, provision can be made for a future reference room to be located on the second floor, as previously suggested. This same general arrangement may be carried out in a building with a corner entrance, with slight modifications, and can be made a very practical plan.

Delivery Room. One of the most important points to be considered in the planning of a library building, should be such an arrangement of the delivery room and delivery counter as to secure absolute supervision over the entire first floor, with the fewest attendants. The annual maintenance must not be spent entirely upon the running expenses of the library and leave nothing for the purchase of new books, if we expect the public to continue their active interest in library work that has been so well begun.

Too much emphasis cannot be placed upon this matter of supervision. It has happened in more than one case, that after the completion of a new library of monumental architecture, it is discovered that the cost of administration has increased two or three fold over that of the old library, which, perhaps, was located on the second floor of a commercial building, where all the departments were in one large room, with no more substantial division between the book stacks and the reading room than a light railing. On the other hand, we have in mind a library in which the

superior convenience of the new building so facilitated the administration that it was found possible to decrease the number of attendants.

The "open shelf" system of library management calls for a very different arrangement of the delivery desk from what has been used heretofore. With the old arrangement there was usually a long counter, the public being kept on the outside and the librarian and assistants on the inside, the public not having access to the bookcases. Now that the public is being admitted more freely to the book stacks, the librarian must be surrounded by a counter on all sides. This new style of delivery counter is at present in a state of evolution, and we cannot say what is the best arrangement until we can learn from experience with those already built. But we must provide for the charging of new books and the return of same, bearing in mind that the librarian is not always expected to get the books for the readers, but that the readers will select their own books and bring them to the librarian's desk to be charged, and that the books will be naturally brought to the back of the desk; that is, the readers will come from the book stack.

A convenient method is to have the public pass always to the right, so that in coming in the readers will leave their books on one side of the counter, and coming out will have the new books charged on the opposite side. The

logical result of the open shelf plan is to make less of the delivery room than heretofore. It is well to have seats for those who are waiting, but readers who come to draw books usually pass at once into the book stack, and, therefore, it is more convenient to place the card catalogue in the stack room, or in the back of the delivery counter, where it can be reached by the librarian as well as the public.

The delivery counter must have conveniences with which librarians are familiar—such as shelves to hold the books returned until they are taken to the stack room, card catalogue drawers for the shelf list, a drawer for library cards, cash drawer, etc.

In the smaller libraries, the main work of the library will be done inside of the delivery counter; therefore, there should be ample space for two attendants, with a work table and shelves beneath the counter to hold books to be repaired, etc.

The designing of the delivery counter to meet the demands of the library is one of the most particular problems that the library architect is called upon to solve.

One of the chief difficulties in planning a library is the proper lighting of the delivery counter, which must, of necessity, be placed near the center of the building, and, hence, farthest removed from the windows. In a library of considerable size it is almost a necessity to introduce light from the top. In

a one-story building there is no difficulty in resorting to a skylight to illuminate a ceiling light above the delivery counter. In this way abundance of light can be obtained, but care must be taken to avoid the excessive heat from a skylight by efficient ventilation of the same.

Library Floors. The flooring of a library is a detail of importance. Marble and mosaic are hand some and durable, but too noisy for use, except in the vestibule and stairhall. Hard wood is more frequently employed, but even such floors are noisy, and the ideal material seems to be cork carpet, or very heavy linoleum. A very good combination can be made of mosaic, and hard wood and cork carpet, by which we can preserve both beauty and utility, by using cork carpet for the center, both of reading rooms and delivery room, and making a border of marble or mosaic in the delivery room, and of hard wood in the reading rooms.

General Reading and Reference Room. In the moderate sized library, the moment the children are taken out of the general reading room, it becomes more of a reference room and most of the reference books, as well as bound magazines, should be in this room. Space should also be provided for periodicals and magazines, and there should be a newspaper rack.

The present tendency of bringing the public as much as possible into direct contact with the books, is leading librarians to demand the utmost amount of wall shelving around the walls of the general reading and reference room, and the children's reading room. To accomplish this it is even urged that the windows all be placed above the tops of the book cases. There is danger that a very good movement may be carried to excess, and mistakes may be made in sacrificing the window outlook to wall shelving. In a reading room of large dimensions, the window sills may be placed five or six feet from the floor; but in the smaller rooms of the average library such an arrangement produces a feeling of oppression and confinement that is very objectionable. It is quite likely that the outlook from the reading room is upon a handsome lawn, or gives a view of an interesting street, and the public is much more likely to use the library if the reading rooms are pleasant and it is possible to rest the eyes occasionally by a look from the window, than if they are shut in on all sides by cases of books. In this case, as in many others, the middle course is safest. It often happens that the view from the end windows is undesirable, and it is a positive gain to utilize the the wall space for books, getting a sufficient light above the top of the cases, at the same time making the front windows with low sills, to give an outlook.

Small tables in reading rooms are usually preferred to the larger ones, and it is advisable to have a light standard on each table, in addition to the general illumination of the room from the ceiling.

Ventilation. The ventilation of the reading rooms should be ample, and it is fortunate that we can here unite the utmost simplicity and effectiveness of the ventilation with architectural adornment to the room, by making the ventilation through a fireplace. Such fireplaces should have flues proportional for ventilation, and not heating, and if properly arranged will have a good draft, even though there be no fire burning.

General Room. Opening off of the reading room it is well to have a general utility room, the purpose of which cannot always be determined in advance. If there is no separate reference room, this may be used as such; or, it may be used as a study for readers making special investigations.

The public library is coming to be considered more and more as an integral part of our system of public education, as a necessary supplement to our public schools. It will doubtless become more frequent in the future for teachers to send their pupils to the public library in order to prepare for their school problems, and also, teachers will accompany their classes to the library and instruct them in its use. Some room is needed to accom-

modate such classes. Some of our librarians are doing effective missionary work in getting boys in from the street and reading to them, and for such a purpose a room is needed on the main floor, convenient for the librarian.

Children's Reading Room. This is the children's library. It is the room that belongs to them, and to them alone. It has their especial books on the shelves. It has its own card catalogue, which even the younger children learn to use. If possible, it has a special attendant to assist the children, but even with such assistance the children are allowed to take the books from the shelves. There must be pictures on the walls, and drawers in which pictures and photographs can be kept.

A lavatory is also needed for washing the juvenile hands. For motives of economy, the washbowl may be put in the stack room, immediately adjoining the children's room, and it must be where the librarian can have oversight of it.

Tables and chairs in the children's room must be of a height suited to their use. There should be at least two heights of tables, for the smaller and larger children, with chairs to correspond.

Stack Room. Under the old method of library administration the main points to be considered in arranging the stack room were, to secure good lighting, provide for future

extension, and arrange the stacks so as to save the librarian steps in getting the books and bringing them to the delivery counter. With the open shelf method, the lighting and extension must be considered the same, but now in a great many cases the librarian stands or sits at her central station and the readers find their own books, and we must introduce a new element, viz: the supervision of the stack room from the delivery counter. There is only one arrangement that promises perfect supervision, viz: the radiating stack, which permits the librarian from one point to view every aisle between the book-cases.

It will be found that this form of stack has other merits. Even if the librarian has to get the books, it permits going from the delivery counter to any given book in a straight line. It, furthermore, gives better lighting than is possible with parallel book stacks. The aisles between the cases widen out towards the windows, permitting broader windows and more efficient lighting.

The radiating stack occupies somewhat more space than the old type, but the advantages more than offset the slight additional cost.

It is, apparently, not as easy to make future extensions to the radiating stack as it is with the cases arranged in parallel rows. But it should be borne in mind that it is not by any

means easy to build extensions to the old type of stack, and a careful study of the comparative merits of the two types of stack, will show that the radiating stack is not greatly behind the old type in its capacity for extension. It would be wise, however, to make the stack room larger at the beginning than needed for its immediate use, putting in the book-cases as they are needed. This would permit leaving out each alternate case, giving alcoves, which would be greatly appreciated by the readers.

The free access plan has obliterated, to a great degree, the distinction between the stack room and the reading room. Books are placed on shelves in the reading room, and the readers are admitted to the stack room, and the problem of a reference room can often be solved, practically as well as economically, by keeping the reference books in the stack room and allowing sufficient open spaces for consulting them there.

Expansion of the stack room may be made vertically, as well as horizontally. This was objected to under the old system, as necessitating the climbing of stairs by the librarian. But the public will not complain if some of the books are placed in the gallery in the stack room. Such a gallery can be arranged so as to be in full view from the delivery counter. I conceive of a model stack room as consisting of three levels: The main floor on a level with

the delivery counter, containing the popular works; a basement for government reports and other bulky volumes of value, but which are seldom consulted, and a gallery for special collections of scientific works, to be used mainly by students. If the main floor is shelved to its utmost capacity, the gallery can be made in the form of alcoves, giving a series of studies where the reader may be quiet and find within his reach the works on his special topic, and each of these alcoves be under the control of the librarian.

Metal stacks have become justly popular, and should be of simple pattern, so as not to collect dust.

Librarian's Room. In a small library the librarian's room can be used for a trustees room, and also for cataloguing purposes. In the larger libraries it is necessary to have a separate cataloguing room, and in still larger libraries there must be a staff room, with provisions for the wraps of the attendants, filing cabinets for correspondence, etc.

Basement and Second Story. The utilization of these stories is a matter of great importance for club rooms and purposes not directly a part of the library work, but naturally and properly allied thereto.

In conclusion, I wish to repeat that the public library is in a state of evolution. Certain fundamental principles are clear, and will not be changed, but we have not yet

reached an ultimate conclusion on matters of detail. The librarians have accomplished great things in the evolution of the public library, and if the architectural profession has justly been accused of apathy, such a charge is now a thing of the past, for not a few architects are making serious study of the library problem and laboring, not without success, to meet the exacting requirements of the question.

It is difficult to close this paper without a discussion of library design, but I feel it will be safe to dismiss this with a few words, because every one knows that the design is the work of the architect, because the architect is usually allowed pretty full sway in carrying out his artistic ideas. It is less understood that the architect, if he at all fulfills his mission, must also be acquainted with the practical working details of the library building, and the importance of these practical matters is more apt to be overlooked by building committees than those of design. Therefore this paper has dealt with these practical matters in the hope that their consideration by library trustees, librarians and architects together, will result in a still further advance of our library architecture.

In regard to design, time permits only a word of congratulation that the public taste is improving year by year. There is less desire for mere show and a vulgar display of

cheap materials. The revival of classic architecture is bringing with it an appreciation of the refinement that characterizes such work, and a desire that our libraries shall be built of enduring materials, and shall be nobly and fitly designed, even though simplicity is enforced by financial considerations. We should remember, above all things, not to lavish our money for the adornment of the exterior to such an extent as to curtail the proper treatment of the interior of the building. There has been great development in the manufacture of brick, and artistic effects can be produced in this material. When the appropriation is small no attempt should be made to build of stone, for brick is an honest material, and its possibilities have not yet been exhausted.

This paper has discussed the library question in a logical order: First, the selection of the librarian and architect, then the working out of the practical problem, leaving to the last a word on the design, for the design of the building must follow the plan and be a fitting expression of the purposes and arrangement of the building. The library of today in its arrangement is a new creation. We cannot clothe it in second-hand garments. No more interesting problem is presented to the architect than the evolution of the library, first in its practical form, and then in an artistic expression, that shall fitly represent the high position the building occupies in the community.